

Matchmaker: Prep Football Players Get Helping Hand

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Mequon - High school football practice doesn't even begin until Tuesday. But already, a couple of records have been broken and a few important lessons have been learned.

All of that happened during a season of recruiting combines conducted by Xcel Sports Training of Middleton. The company's summer program ended with camps Friday in Wisconsin Rapids, Saturday in Neenah and one Sunday that was attended by hopeful future college players at Homestead High School.

Earlier in the weekend, Westosha Central senior lineman Austin Creshaw tied the combine's bench press record by lifting 225 pounds 20 times. On Sunday, Tha Trinh, a senior at Beloit Memorial, broke the combine record for the 40-yard dash, an electronically-timed 4.45 seconds.

All that and some learning, too? That's the goal of Xcel owner and President Todd Goldbeck, who played football on a NCAA Division III championship team at UW-La Crosse.

"The (eventual) Division II and Division III players who hadn't had any interest shown (by colleges) before coming to us, they're the ones who are most grateful," Goldbeck said. "Often times, they never knew about all the opportunities that were out there.

"We want the kids to know that they don't have to limit themselves to a Division I program or a program in Wisconsin. We tell them to seek out the best program for them individually, and we get their names out there. We know how important choosing a college can be. We played football in college, and the guys we played with are still our best friends. It is fun to help high school players have those same experiences."

After a couple of hours running and jumping inside the Homestead gymnasium, taking part in physical tests including weightlifting, sprinting, jumping and shuttle runs, the combine concluded with a talk by David Carl of the National Collegiate Scouting Association. Another former player from an earlier UW-La Crosse national championship team, Carl works as a liaison between athletes and colleges of all sizes.

Carl urged the players to be proactive in contacting coaches, learning the rules of recruiting and getting more information on financial aid packages that supplement (or replace) athletic scholarships.

"There are more than a million high school football players in the country, and about 295,000 are seniors," Carl said. "Each year, about 16,200 college spots are available — that's less than 6% of the seniors — and the number of seniors who go on to receive fully funded scholarships at the Division I level is 0.8%.

"So it makes sense to give yourself as many options as possible, and to consider all the options that are out there."

That lesson was not lost on the speedy Trinh, a running back who wants to play Division I ball, even though he had only about 70 rushing attempts for about 400 yards last season.

"I have been trying my hardest to do well this year, and this combine gives me a chance to measure how far I've gotten," said Trinh, who has filled out questionnaires for some Division I programs, including Northern Illinois.

His 40-yard time will be enough to increase interest, especially since one of the services Xcel offers is a Web site that carries all the measurements, times and distances recorded at the combine, and allows players to log in and add updates on their regular-season performances.

"I had a (hand-timed) 4.29 time in the summer, so I wasn't surprised by this," Trinh said. "I've been working to improve."

Max Vos, a senior running back and linebacker at Burlington Catholic Central, heard of the combine just last week and decided to attend as a final test before practice begins.

"It gets me in the right frame of mind for the season," he said. "We should have a good team, and I want to do my part. This gives me a chance to see how I stack up against the competition."

Xcel's Web site: www.xcelsportstraining.net